

## **PROPOSAL TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY TO ESTABLISH OR MODIFY AN UNDERGRADUATE MINOR**

**Title of the proposed minor:** Revision to and Retitling of the Minor in Religious Studies (proposed name- Minor in Religion), College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

**Sponsoring unit(s):** Religion

Contact: Kelly Ritter, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, [ritterk@illinois.edu](mailto:ritterk@illinois.edu)

### **Brief description of the program of study:**

The Minor in Religion currently exists as a 21-hour program with several required courses. The proposed revision would modestly scale back the number of hours to 18 while removing the currently existing requirements. The aim of the revision is to increase flexibility in the minor and thereby give students the opportunity to either gain a broad knowledge of a number of religious traditions or to emphasize one field in the academic study of Religion.

We also propose to align the name of the minor to the name of the Department and the undergraduate and graduate curricula. Our department designation as the Department of Religion was effective Fall 2008; our undergraduate major was retitled to Religion effective fall 2009; our Master's degree program was established in Fall 2012 as an MA in Religion; we recently changed the name of our course subject from Religious Studies (RLST) to Religion (REL). The name change to the undergraduate minor is the final update that we will need to make within our department.

**Justification:** The proposed revision includes two substantial changes.

- (1) The revised minor would reduce the number of hours by 3 (from 21 to 18) to make the minor more accessible for students and to conform to current LAS guidelines.
- (2) The revised minor would drop all present course requirements. These currently include: a) World Religions (RLST 110), b) one course in philosophy or ethics of religion (a short list of options), and c) distribution of courses across traditions (designated as "Western" and "Asian." The resulting program would require 18 hours of coursework in REL courses by the student in an individualized plan developed in consultation with the department's undergraduate advisor.

The department values the importance of encountering diverse traditions in the study of religion; the revised minor does not intend to reduce that commitment. The proposed revision aims to increase the flexibility of the minor program for students, while relying on the student-advisor relationship to encourage a well-rounded curriculum. We realize that the proposed revision represents a novel approach to the minor (indeed, we found only one other program that has a minor without core requirements). But we do not come to this proposed path lightly and only arrived at this proposal after much deliberation.

The proposal attempts to do justice to three distinctive features of the department and its curriculum. First, there is no single "gateway" to the department for students. The World Religions class (REL 110) is indeed extremely popular, but students encounter our department through many avenues, and thus we are reluctant to prescribe any defined path that would usher the students through a single threshold into the department's program. Second, the minor pairs very well with a wide number of majors across the campus, and our minors come from a variety of major areas, including other humanities departments (especially English and History), social sciences (Political Science, Psychology, Anthropology), natural sciences (especially programs in the biological sciences), and

even from colleges beyond LAS (especially the College of Media). As a result, students who pursue a minor in our department may have vastly different understandings of how this degree program contributes to their academic progress and goals. Consequently, we judge that it would be valuable to such students to maximize the available flexibility in meeting the minor requirements. Third, the department of religion is a relatively small unit with, historically speaking, a small number of minors. It is the intention of the department that minors work closely with a faculty advisor (the department's Director of Undergraduate Studies) to craft a program of study that both addresses the student's aims and also encourages the student to encounter a diversity of the course offerings in the department. We believe that the twin goals of breadth of study and acknowledgment of a student's interest are better met through the advising process than through set requirements.

From the viewpoint of the discipline of the study of religion, the present requirements impose a sharper distinction between "Western" and "Asian" traditions than disciplinary boundaries would entirely support. In recent years, moreover, the department has added faculty with specialties (e.g., Indigenous religious traditions, Religion and Environment, Religion in America, Religion and Gender) that do not neatly fit into categories defined by boundaries set by individual religious traditions. Thus, by increasing the flexibility of the minor, we can encourage students to investigate more deeply the specialties currently represented on our faculty. Finally, we note that there are not enough current offerings in any one tradition for a student to meet the 6-course requirement solely by studying a single tradition. Thus, the availability of courses alone will guarantee a measure of diversity and we are confident that exposure to various traditions will stimulate further interest in broadening horizons in the students.

In sum, we propose these changes with the recognition that there are some risks in setting aside formal requirements. But we weigh these risks against the benefits of a more flexible program that can better meet individual students' academic interests. We judge, however, that this aim is met more effectively through the relationship of the advisor with the student than through prescribed distributions. There is also a potential curricular gain for students in opening possibility for deeper investigation of a tradition (or group of traditions) than the current structure of the minor supports.

**Budgetary and Staff Implications:**

- a. No additional staff or funding required.
- b. The revised minor will remove the requirement for students to complete RLST 110 (World Religions) and RLST 230 or 231 (Philosophy of Religion). This will have a modest impact in that spaces in those classes (which are always fully enrolled) will open for other interested students.
- c. The proposed revision will have no effect on course enrollments in other departments.
- d. The proposed revision will have no impact on library, computer use, laboratory use, equipment, etc.

**Requirements:**

6 courses (18 hours) REL courses, at least six hours at the advanced (300- or 400-) level, with no more than six hours at the 100 level.

**Prerequisites for the minor:** No prerequisites are required.

**Expected enrollment in the minor:** Currently 5-10 students per year complete the Minor. We anticipate that the changes might slightly increase the number, but will not have a substantial impact.

**Admission to the minor:** While the minor is self-declared by students, completion of the minor requires submission of a “Minor Plan of Study.” Students will meet with the director of undergraduate studies to complete this form and to map out an integrated course of study.

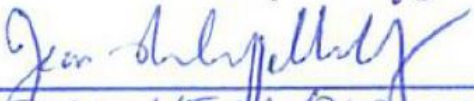
**Minor advisor: Students will be advised by the Director of Undergraduate Studies.**

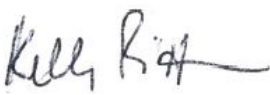
As a small department, advising is conducted by the faculty member currently serving as the department’s director of Undergraduate studies. This has been sufficient resource for the number of undergraduate students pursuing either the major or the minor, and has been effective in maintaining consistency of advice for all of the students. We do not expect the proposed revision to result in a large increase in the minor, but if such an increase would happen, the Director of Undergraduate Studies would share advising duties with other members of the department’s committee on Undergraduate studies.

**Certification of successful completion:** The college of the student will confirm whether the minor has been completed, based on the course work designated by the college of the sponsoring department/unit. If a Minor Modification Form is needed, the college offering the minor will review the course substitutions, in consultation with the department sponsoring the minor if needed, and approve completion of the minor with the college of the student.

**CLEARANCES:**

  
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Head/chair of the sponsoring department or unit:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Academic Head/Director

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the college of the sponsoring department or unit:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair, Senate Educational Policy Committee:

**Proposed Effective Date:** Fall, 2018

**Statement for the Academic Catalog:**

Minor in Religion

Email: [religion@illinois.edu](mailto:religion@illinois.edu)  
[www.religion.illinois.edu](http://www.religion.illinois.edu)

The Minor in Religion is designed to give students the opportunity either to gain a broad knowledge of a number of religious traditions or to emphasize one field in the academic study of Religion. Completion of the minor requires 6 courses selected by the student in consultation with the director of undergraduate studies.

Six REL courses, at least 6 hours at the 300- or 400-level, no more than 6 hours at the 100-level	18
Total Hours	18

**Appendix A**  
**Comparative Table of Proposed Changes**

<b>Current Requirements</b>	<b>Current Hours</b>	<b>Proposed Requirements</b>	<b>Proposed Hours</b>
RLST 110 (World Religions)	3		
One course in Ethics or Philosophy of Religion	3		
Five additional courses:	15	Six courses selected by student in consultation with advisor	18
Two courses from an Asian religious tradition			
Two courses from the Western religious traditions			
No more than nine (9) hours may be selected from courses at the 100 level		No more than six (6) hours may be selected from courses at the 100 level	
At least six (6) hours must be selected from courses at the 300 or 400 level		At least six (6) hours must be selected from courses at the 300 or 400 level	
<b>Total hours</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>18</b>

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Office of the Dean

2090 Lincoln Hall  
702 S. Wright Street, MC-448  
Urbana, IL 61801



October 23, 2017

Kathryn Martensen  
Associate Provost  
Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
207 Swanlund Administration Building  
MC-304

Dear Kathy:

The Committee on Courses and Curricula on behalf of the Faculty of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has voted to approve the following proposal:

**Revision and Retitling of the Minor in Religious Studies (proposed name- Minor in Religion)**

Please address all correspondence concerning this proposal to me. This proposal is now ready for review by the Senate Educational Policy Committee for proposed implementation in Fall 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kelly Ritter'.

Kelly Ritter  
Associate Dean

enclosures

C: Professor Valerie Hoffman  
Professor Richard Layton